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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH ROK PRESIDENT LEE  
MYUNG-BAK

Classified By: Ambassador Stephens. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a thirty-minute meeting immediately upon concluding the presentation of credentials ceremony, President Lee warmly welcomed the Ambassador, telling her that she was in a position to bring Americans and Koreans even closer together. Lee said that he took pride in restoring trust in the U.S.-ROK relations. Even during the beef crisis, he was careful in sticking to his commitments made to the President, despite the demand from some quarters to take the "easy way out." Lee was delighted with recent progress in several fronts, including Korea's entry into the Visa Waiver Program, establishing the WEST program and Congressional passage of the legislation to upgrade South Korea's Foreign Military Sales (FMS). President Lee looked forward to ratifying the KORUS FTA, which, he said, could pass the Korean National Assembly "anytime," because his was the majority party. President Lee also raised the issue of the New Embassy Complex (NEC) and said he wanted to see rapid progress on a project, which, he reminded everyone, was a project he undertook when he was mayor of Seoul.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador said she was delighted to be Seoul and appreciated the warm reception she was receiving. South Korea had changed enormously, but she still heard from Koreans a traditional warm personal welcome as well a desire to have good U.S.-Korean relations. Conveying President Bush's appreciation for President Lee's efforts to strengthen U.S.-ROK relations, the Ambassador said that she looked forward to the challenge of taking this relationship a step further. Agreeing with Lee on the importance of the FTA, the Ambassador said that President Bush also wanted to see the agreement ratified as soon as possible. The Ambassador noted that Washington and Seoul had a number of challenging issues ahead, including how to deal with North Korea. The key to making progress on these issues was to consult closely and work together, the Ambassador said. DCM, POL M/C, and DATT accompanied the Ambassador. President Lee was accompanied by FM Yu and NSA Kim. END SUMMARY.

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U.S.-ROK Relations: "Restoring Trust"  
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¶3. (C) After a short Blue House ceremony to present her credentials, President Lee invited the Ambassador to the Audience Room. Lee said that all Koreans welcomed the Ambassador. She had struck a chord among Koreans for her service in the Peace Corps during Korea's very difficult days and her obvious command of Korean language and culture. The Ambassador had come to Korea at the "right time." She would find plenty of challenges, but she would also discover that

Koreans approached their relations with the United States with "confidence and optimism." Lee considered the United States to be the bedrock of Korean foreign and security policy, as did the vast majority of South Koreans. His efforts were now placed on restoring the trust.

14. (C) Even during the beef crisis earlier this year, Lee continued, he never once thought about reneging on his commitment to resume U.S. beef imports. That would have been easy, but completely contrary to his promise to President Bush, and also a major setback for South Korea's international standing. Emphasizing that support for the United States remained deep and broad, Lee noted that about 30,000 South Koreans had come out to welcome President Bush to Seoul in August.

15. (C) The Ambassador said that President Bush was very appreciative of the warm welcome he had received from President Lee and the Korean public. She also could see that there was a strong desire among Koreans to see our relationship move forward. There were plenty of challenges ahead, including ratifying the FTA, those posed by North Korean, implementing the Yongsan relocation and other plans, and opportunities such as the VWP and WEST programs. To make progress, Seoul and Washington had to work even more closely together, the Ambassador emphasized.

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KORUS FTA  
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16. (C) President Lee said that he had hoped that the U.S.

Congress could ratify the FTA during a "lame duck" session this fall. However, this might not be easy given the U.S. electoral calendar. The Korean National Assembly was prepared to ratify the agreement "anytime." His own party, the (conservative) Grand National Party, had an outright majority. Moreover, the opposition Democratic Party also should support the agreement, because the FTA negotiations were concluded under their administration. This agreement benefited both countries. Lee hoped that the U.S. Congress would act decisively, as it had done the previous week with the financial rescue bill. American leadership was needed now more than ever on these global economic and financial issues, Lee said.

17. (C) The Ambassador assured President Lee that the President and the Administration remained deeply committed to the KORUS FTA. On her part, the Ambassador said, she would stay in close touch with Washington ) and with legislators in Seoul -- with an eye to moving forward to ratification at an opportune time.

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FMS, VWP, WEST  
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18. (C) The Ambassador said that she was encouraged by developments on several fronts. In Washington, the legislation to upgrade South Korea's military procurement status had passed both houses. The measure now goes to the President who was expected to sign it into law. With this change, foreign military sales with Korea would be treated most favorably, just as those with NATO, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Progress on South Korea's entry into the Visa Waiver Program had also moved forward substantially over the past several weeks. The Ambassador hoped that South Koreans could make visa-free visits to the United States as soon as early January. Similarly, the MOU for the WEST (Work, English Study, and Travel) program was signed by the Secretary and FM Yu in New York two weeks ago; this program would allow young Koreans to study and work in the U.S.

19. (C) President Lee thanked the Ambassador for the FMS upgrade, which, he said, was a very positive development. On the VWP and WEST, Lee commented that these were exactly the kind of programs the Korean people wanted. Making these

programs a reality would enhance enormously the Korean public's perception of the United States. Lee estimated that the VWP could double Korean visitors to the United States. The WEST program would allow young Koreans to truly experience America, which could only be good for the U.S.-ROK alliance.

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North Korea  
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¶10. (C) President Lee said that there were plenty of challenges too. Among them were North Korea's progress toward denuclearization and what to do about its deplorable record on human rights. President Lee said that he knew that Senator Brownback was deeply concerned about North Korean human rights, which became an issue during the Ambassador's confirmation. Lee himself had been outspoken on this issue, unlike his predecessor. Agreeing, the Ambassador noted that President Lee had spoken eloquently about North Korean human rights, remarks which had been highly appreciated in Washington and elsewhere in the United States. The Ambassador said she had held several discussions with Senator Brownback, emphasizing the opportunity to work closely with President Lee and his administration to find the most effective way to improve North Korean human rights. On the Six Party Talks, the Ambassador said that A/S Hill consulted closely with his ROKG counterparts upon his return from Pyongyang last week and was now back in Washington to brief Secretary Rice. There were no simple solutions to these challenges; the only way to make progress was for Washington and Seoul to work in unison, the Ambassador again emphasized.

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NEC  
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¶11. (C) President raised the need for a New Embassy Complex by saying that "this must be done soon." Camp Coiner, Lee

observed, was a great location because all of Seoul was moving south. Yongsan would be the center of Seoul soon. The Ambassador said she had never imagined she would be back as Ambassador at the same Embassy building where she took the Foreign Service exam in 1975. The site we had identified at Yongsan was indeed a good location; we were all happy with it. However, we had missed previous opportunities, and this time, we must make irreversible progress--and quickly. President Lee turned to FM Yu and urged him to be as helpful as possible. The Ambassador closed the meeting by thanking President Lee for his recognition of Peace Corps/Korea and his help in making a reunion possible for the former Peace Corps Volunteers. Like her, many former Volunteers were thrilled to see so much progress in such a short time. President Lee said the Volunteers should be very proud of their contribution in making modern Korea.

STEPHENS